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AUTHOR	Labruyere, Chantal
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INSTITUTION	Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications, Paris (France).
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ABSTRACT

In France, most services provided to people in their homes are much less regulated than the same services provided in an institutional context. With the exception of providers of paramedical services, providers of home help are not required to possess particular training or diplomas. Until 1987, France's home help policies followed the Swedish model, according to which the home help needs of certain populations were subsidized through cash allowances, in-kind services, and/or government subsidies. In 1987, France instituted tax changes that lowered the final cost of home services for users and authorized the creation of organizations responsible for placing employees and helping administer work contracts between employers and their employees. Those measures blurred the formerly clear distinction between household employees and home help. Although policy changes have had a positive effect for employees of private individuals placed on the traditional domestic services market, they have contributed to deterioration of the employment conditions of household maintenance service employees. There has been talk of improving the image of home help occupations through certification; however, the process runs the risk of creating barriers for candidates with the necessary interpersonal skills but without the required level of education. (MN)

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. FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

SERVICES FOR PERSONS AT HOME: ISSUES OF PROFESSIONALISATION

The growth of services for persons at home, often confused with the broader category of proximity services within which they fall, has given rise to a wealth of government initiatives that have in turn generated new forms of activities. These have contributed to a certain confusion in a field previously composed of two branches of professional activities, home help and domestic services, which converge today around the idea of family employment. In addition, new tools for administering the wage relationship — the service-employment cheque and the intermediate agency — are difficult to reconcile with the professionalisation of these jobs that is nonetheless evoked by all the partners involved.

Considered for nearly ten years as a potential job pool that is only waiting for rational exploitation, activities related to services for persons at home have been the focus of numerous development schemes. While attention has mainly been brought to bear on the number of jobs that the different public-aid measures have helped to create, Céreq chose to investigate the nature of the jobs created and the sector's ability to professionalise its employees.[1]

Various studies conducted at the European level have brought out the considerable needs for home help.[2] Thus, the scope of the relevant job pool depends, in each country, not only on the demographic structure but also on other social, cultural, and financial choices relating to:

- The role of women in the society. These choices may or may not favour their professional activity;[3]
- The ways the different categories of publics involved are aided. Certain measures may favour accommodation in specialised institutions (for the elderly, the ill and mentally ill or the handicapped), or home care (see "In Focus" for the assistance provided). For childcare, they may privilege collective solutions in terms of facilities (day nurseries) or individual solutions (child-care allowances).

It should be noted that in France, most assistance positions (see "In Focus") have given rise to fairly strict employment regulations when such functions are carried out in an institutional context, in which case they give rise to the creation of distinct "occupations". When carried out at home, these same functions are much less regulated (with the exception of paramedical care): they are often lumped together under the generic label of services to persons at home or family employment, and they do not require particular training or diplomas.

Not only can the scope of the needs for home help vary from one country to another, but the forms of satisfaction are far from homogeneous. Laville has demonstrated the existence of two possible paths of development, the American and the Swedish.[4] She also observes that, "In the beginning of the 1990s, the European countries seemed to hesitate over the choice of the model, seeking to reconcile two constraints—limiting the decrease in remunerations and limiting the rise in compulsory pay deductions." In what follows, we shall attempt to analyse the choices made in France at the end of the 1980s and some of their consequences.

1. This study was carried out under a research contract between Céreq and the General Planning Commission. See L. Causse, C. Fournier, and C. Labruyère, *Le développement des emplois familiaux. Effets sur les métiers de l'aide à domicile*, Céreq Document no. 121 (Marseilles, 1997).
2. See in particular J.L. Laville, *Les services de proximité en Europe* (Paris: Syros, 1992).
3. See J. L. Laville, *Les initiatives locales en Europe* (Paris: CRIDA, 1996), p. 11.
4. ". . . . in its most schematic form, [the American model] consists of increasing jobs at the expense of remunerations . . . with the decrease in wage costs functioning as the level that permits the creation of employment. Under these circumstances, services provided at home become profitable for the companies or household employers . . . . By contrast, Sweden has created community activities marked by a concern for egalitarianism and social responsibility . . . . Services for the elderly depend mainly on the municipalities and are practically free for the user." Laville, *Les initiatives locales en Europe*, pp. 18-20.

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Changes in Home-Help Policies in France since 1987

Until 1987, France had largely opted for the Swedish model, whereby the response to the home-help needs of certain categories of the population consisted of public assistance in one of three forms:

• payment of a cash allowance for handicapped persons, who might or might not use it to pay for home-help services (with no monitoring of the effectiveness of the aid);[5]

• in-kind services (hours of household help) financed by the pension funds, with a contribution from beneficiaries calculated on the basis of their income. The need for this service led to the creation of domestic-help organisations employing a very large number of female workers placed at the disposition of beneficiaries.

• government subsidies for personal-assistance services (covering about 50 % of the wage costs for each assistant post) for the handicapped, as a provision of services, billed below the real cost.

The needs of other publics, particularly those of economically active households, were not eligible for any form of assistance; thus, only the most comfortable households had recourse to "domestic employees"[6] as private employers. But in the context of this informal relationship, there was a great deal of undeclared work, which allowed households to avoid paying social security contributions for their employees.

Since 1987, lowering labour costs of household employers has been held to be the most effective means of increasing employment. Initially, this is accomplished through exemption from social-security contributions for certain categories of such employers (persons over 70 years of age or the handicapped, families with young children). This lowering of the final cost of the service for the user is then reinforced and expanded through a tax deduction extended to all taxable households.

A parallel measure authorises the creation of organisations responsible for placing employees and assisting in the administration of work contracts between private employers (who benefit from social-security exemptions) and their employees. Although these "intermediate" organisations offer a similar service to that of provider organisations who supply their own personnel (recruitment, replacement, time sheets, pay slips), they do not benefit from the same exemptions.

5. Third Party Complementary Allowance allocated on the basis of income.

6. "Domestic employees" is a generic term designating all employees of private individuals covered by the domestic employees' collective agreement, including cleaning women, child minders, household aides, cooks, etc.

From 1987 to 1995, employment by private individuals accounted for the creation of some 70,000 full-time jobs.

This group of measures contributed to a considerable increase in the number of household employers (47 % from 1987 to 1994) as well as in the number of declared family employees (23 %). In most instances, however, the assignment is of an extremely part-time nature: in 1994, the weekly average for home help was 8 hours, and very few employees (about 2 out of 10) managed to arrive at half-time work.

The most recent stimulus for family employment came in 1995 with the implementation of the service-employment cheque, which automatically deducts social security payments, as a means of simplifying administrative procedures for declaring and paying employees. Originally restricted to short assignments (less than 8 hours a week), this measure can now be used to pay full-time employees. After one year of experimentation (through 1995), it was used by nearly 25 percent of household employers and had at the same time contributed to increasing their numbers. During this first phase, substitution for other methods of remuneration remained quite limited.

Thus, over the past ten years, France's home-help scene has undergone considerable change. The number of "domestic-services" employees (*i.e.* those working for private individuals) has shown a dramatic increase, which has translated into the creation of some seventy thousand full-time-equivalent (FTE) jobs from 1987 to 1995. During the same period, the domestic-help organisations recorded only seven thousand additional FTE jobs, marking a break with previous rates of increase.

The expansion of the service supply in a very individualised form, somewhat akin to the self-employment model, has not failed to affect the nature of the jobs themselves or the conditions of employment and professionalisation of those involved in these activities.

Destructuring Effects of Employment Policy at the Level of the Occupational Branches

The clear distinction between two categories of home workers, namely household employees (going back to the traditional figure of the domestic) and home help (relating instead to the social worker) has given way to a certain confusion of types, with two new and still evolving kinds of employees joining the existing ones:

• a figure close to the self-employment model, namely the cleaning woman with multiple employers, who maintains

commercial rather than wage-earning relations with her clients, particularly when the "clients" pay her with service-employment cheques;

• a hybrid figure, namely the delegated home-help worker, employed in part by a home-help organisation and in part by the households where she intervenes, in function of the income level of the users. Indeed, above a certain income ceiling, it is more economical for the elderly to employ help via an intermediate agency than to pay the bill for the home-help service directly.

The two traditional figures reflected two totally distinct activity sectors:

• "domestic services," composed of all those employed by private individuals and covered by the national collective agreement for "home employees" signed in 1980. The main feature of this agreement lies in the tax deduction offered to employers, amounting to one-third of the formal rate for the "hours of responsible presence," which are "hours of watching a natural person, without real work," up to 75 percent of the hours spent in the home. This possibility applies only to certain kinds of "family-type" work stations that entail monitoring functions (children, invalids, dependent persons). Night duty for these kinds of jobs is also authorised under certain conditions. The agreement anticipates surcharges for seniority accumulated with the same household employer; this is calculated in terms of a percentage of the base wage of each of the five qualification levels.

• the home-help sector, largely made up of household assistants (now home help) and family workers, plus paramedical staff. These workers, when covered by one of the three collective agreements for home help, receive a fixed allowance for travel between several households within the same half-day of work. The seniority scale takes into account experience acquired in the branch. Employees benefit from existing legislation on continuing training and a contingency fund.

After many years of willfully separate existence, the social partners of the two branches have now begun to talk to each other. Indeed, many employees belong to both branches at the same time, as we have seen for the "mixed" activities. Home-help organisations that have created intermediate agencies have been led to supervise, indirectly, employees placed in the context of family jobs and assigned by the collective agreements to the "domestic services" sector. This process has also led them to expand their "clientele" by turning to economically active households in need of home maintenance or child minding. The differences in remuneration, contingency funds, training, travel allowances, and so forth as elaborated in the agreements of the two sectors have become palpable because many employees have experienced both statuses. In addition, the existence of the intermediate agencies has revealed needs that could not be met by traditional services (weekend interventions for tasks relating to daily-life assistance, or night duty for monitoring), which has led the latter to introduce more flexibility into their agreements (authorisation for Sunday work, for example).

For employees of private individuals placed on the traditional domestic-services market, these changes have had positive effects: apart from the decrease in undeclared work, the sharp rise in the volume of activity has permitted an average increase of ten hours of work per month per employee. The average monthly work time went from forty-one hours in 1986 to fifty-one in 1994, and the collective agreement has also undergone positive changes (contingency fund, continuing training). But the service-employment cheque may compromise these advances if it gradually comes to replace other forms of wage relations, notably that of the intermediate agency. In the absence of a work contract for all assignments of less than eight hours a week, employees may find themselves extremely powerless vis-à-vis employers tempted to behave more like clients than employers and overlooking both their own formal responsibilities and the rights of their employees concerning vacations, holidays, and so on.

On the other hand, for household maintenance services employees, the competition from non-profit agencies affecting part of their usual clientele has led to a deterioration of their employment conditions. A portion of the interventions previously depending on home-help services, with the advantages implied (travel time, vocational training, seniority, etc.) is now carried out under the status of family employment. Thus, household assistants who seek more work must often accept assignments of this kind. The growing number of employers has numerous consequences, in terms of remuneration, regularity of payment of wages, administrative entanglements in case of illness or job-related injury, vacations, and so on.

The social partners are hoping for an improvement in the image of home-help occupations, notably through certification. But this very process runs the risk of creating barriers for candidates with a low educational level, even though they might have the necessary interpersonal skills.

The latest arrivals in the home-help sector are more and more often recruited exclusively by agency structures to carry out assignments that are totally identical to those of the household assistants, but without enjoying their status. In the absence of a collective employer with legal responsibility for them, they have little chance of acquiring training to complement their experience.

Forms of Employment at Odds with the Professionalisation of the Sector

The survey among organisation heads and their female employees showed that the professional know-how of the latter lay mainly in the ability to maintain a distance at two distinct levels:

- in relation to their own domestic values and know-how;
- but also in relation to the multiplicity of individual relationships in which they are involved.

On the first point, it seems that the basic role of training is to provide another frame of reference that will allow each agent to reexamine her ways of doing things, as well as the related value systems in order to meet demands for service that vary from one household to another. If initial training may permit the transmission of a professional ideal, professional know-how is forged in daily practice, on the condition that such practice is also subject to review and analysis.

On the second point, the idea of maintaining a distance goes back to the unique, subjective nature of each intervention. These are carried out in the user's home, and most take place in his or her presence, thus placing the agents at the heart of family relations and involving them in that history. They must demonstrate considerable technical and interpersonal skills in face of varied situations. Entering the home of a new client implies creating a new relationship and finding the right position to assume, one which takes into account not only the needs but also the fears and expectations of the other. Remaining professional means finding the right distance in each situation in order to remain attuned and receptive and act in such a way as to avoid any relationship of dependency, in one direction or the other. This requires employees to be able to distance themselves from different situations, some of which are extremely trying—frequent confrontations with the prospect of death, repeated bereavements, transfer phenomena (granddaughter/grandmother, mother/child), but also, on occasion, disrespect, sexual harrassment, and so on.

Obtaining the CAFAD[7] permits these interpersonal skills to be recognised. Preparatory training, limited to those who are currently employed, is mainly based on the experience of concrete work situations. The social partners are hoping that the new diploma instituted in 1995 at the initial training level will contribute to improving the image of the home-help occupations. But this development is not without risks for the future of the sector, insofar as it might lead to the creation of barriers hindering candidates whose low level of schooling compromises their chances for passing an "academic" entry exam, even though they may have the necessary interpersonal skills.

In order to allow home-help workers to overcome their isolation and break the silence surrounding the emotional involvement, the creation of spaces for discussion (continuing training courses and group supervision) seems indispensable. This presumes the existence of real "service enterprises" (non-profit organisations or commercial operations) able to organise and finance these activities, which are not directly productive.[8] On other points as well, the existence of such mediating structures between users and service workers seems essential, namely for:

- ensuring a certain possibility of career advancement, insofar as the organisation is able to guarantee the most fitting match between the services expected and the home worker's professional aptitudes;
- encouraging a positive outcome for conflict situations by intervening between user and service worker to monitor and call to order both employees and clients in relation to the respect of certain rules and mutual commitments.

The tools created since 1987 to encourage home-help jobs in France, especially the service-employment cheque, are not oriented to such an organisation of supply insofar as they favour the development of informal relations and the isolation of employees. "The spread of the service-employment cheque, which does not provide for the remuneration of the organisation, goes against the positive growth of these services. . . ."[9]

Chantal Labruyère

7. Certificate of Aptitude for Home-Help Functions, created in 1988.

8. Financing would be possible by including these activities in the sales price of the service, which could be negotiated with certain funding bodies for this kind of service (local and regional governments, pension funds, etc.).

9. A. Fouquet, "Le concept d'emploi de proximité," *Etudes et recherches de l'ISERES* no. 141 (1995).

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